

The Flower Parable.

('Free Church of Scotland Monthly.')

As Fred Barlow came up the walk he saw through the open door his pretty cousin, Lois, standing with a bouquet of roses in her hands, the picture of perplexity.

'Well,' he said, inquiringly.

'Well,' she repeated, 'what do you think of that?' and she handed him the flowers.

He saw at a glance that the bouquet had been one of rare beauty, but now the flowers were withered. From many of them the petals were fallen, and the ferns and smilax were yellow and drooping. Even as he took it a shower of rose leaves fell at his feet.

'With the love of Mrs. Malden,' he read from the card attached.

'She hasn't just sent it, of course?' he said in a questioning tone.

'Sambo brought it in that box to the door not five minutes ago,' she answered.

Fred picked up the box and looked it over carefully, as if to find some explanation of the strange gift.

'Depend upon it,' he said at length, 'she must have sent it by him several days ago, and the rascal forgot to bring it. Of course she wouldn't insult you by sending you such a specimen.' And he tossed the bouquet contemptuously on the table. 'Come,' he said, 'let's have a game of tennis.'

In the interest of the game Lois forgot the matter, but when she was alone again her perplexity returned.

'I don't believe Sambo could have forgotten it,' she said. 'How beautiful it must have been! I don't understand it at all, and when I get a chance I am going to ask Mrs. Malden.'

The chance came sooner than she expected, for that very afternoon Mrs. Malden called and invited her to ride. Mrs. Malden's stylish turnout was the admiration and envy of all the Creston girls, and Lois felt quite elated as she took her seat in the handsome phaeton. For a little while they talked of indifferent matters, and then Lois said:

'Those were very rare roses you sent me this morning,' thinking as she emphasized 'this morning,' that she would find out whether they had been sent before.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Malden, 'they were beautiful. I gathered and arranged them for you on Monday, but I enjoyed their beauty and fragrance so much I kept them myself as long as I could.'

She spoke seriously, but when she saw the look of amazement on Lois's face she could not conceal a smile.

'If it wasn't a mistake, Mrs. Malden, it must have been a parable,' said Lois decidedly. 'Please tell me quick.'

'Dear Lois,' said her friend, 'I wanted to show you how you mean to treat your best friend.'

If Lois was perplexed before she was wholly mystified now, and begged for an explanation.

'Last week,' said Mrs. Malden, 'I passed a group of high school girls on the street. I think they were talking about Annie Temple's joining the church the week before, for I heard her name, and then I heard one of them say, "Oh, of course, I mean to be a Christian when I get to be an old woman, but now I am young I mean to enjoy myself and have a good time."

'I said that myself,' said Lois, 'but I surely—'

She paused, and after waiting a moment for her to conclude her sentence, Mrs. Malden said:

'There never was a greater mistake than

the idea that becoming a Christian lessens the enjoyment of life; but it is not that I wish to show you. Life lies before you, bright with promise like those budding roses when I gathered them. Beauty and health are yours, mental facilities alert and active, and unnumbered opportunities, and the energies and enthusiasm of youth. And from the friend who has given it all to you, and says, "Give me thine heart," you turn away and answer, "Not yet, O Lord, not yet, wait until I am old and feeble, when bodily strength is failing, when mental powers are waning, when my life can be of no pleasure to myself and no service to thee. Then I will give it to thee." Were not those fading flowers a fit emblem of such a gift, dear Lois?"

The young girl bowed her head in assent, but she made no reply.

The next morning Fred ran in to see why his cousin had not been at the party the evening before. 'Oh, I could not go,' said Lois; 'I wanted to think.'

'To think!' repeated Fred, banteringly. 'I was afraid you were sick, but I had no idea it was anything so serious. Have you called a doctor? Does he think you will get over it? Is it contagious?"

'Oh, I hope it is,' eagerly interrupted Lois, 'I was thinking about those flowers,' and she pointed to the bouquet still standing on the table beside him.

'Oh, yes, I see' Fred began again, 'brooding over the insult you have received. Planning for sweet revenge. If you need any assistance, remember I am at your service.'

But Lois was too much in earnest to smile at his raillery.

'Do you know, Fred, when Mrs. Malden said that she picked those flowers for me Monday, but didn't send them until yesterday, because she wanted to enjoy them herself as long as possible I was too astonished to say a word.'

'I should think so,' said Fred. 'Did she really say that?"

'Yes; and she did it to show me that it was really like you and me putting off being Christians until we are old.'

Fred whistled softly, and Lois went on:

'Don't you see we think that while life is full of hope and promise we will think only of our own enjoyment but when it is almost gone, when, as Mrs. Malden says, it is no pleasure to us and no service to him, then we mean to give it to him.'

'Nonsense, Lois,' said Fred.

'Oh, of course, we never put the thought into so many words, but it really amounts to that. How do you think it sounds?"

'I think it sounds decidedly shabby; and it strikes me you might get left. What if he should refuse such a gift.'

'Oh, no, he wouldn't' said Lois, confidently. 'That "whosoever" takes in the most worn and worthless. But though he would not refuse it, I should be ashamed to offer it. I have been thinking it all out. Christ has given his best for me, and I am going to give my best to him. Will you not do the same, Fred?' And she looked at him with shining eyes.

'Oh, come, don't push a fellow: I haven't "thought it all out," as you say. It seems to me it is asking a good deal,' he replied.

'Asking a good deal! Oh, Fred, it is only asking that you treat the Lord honestly and honorably. It is giving you a chance to make the best possible investment of your life. It is offering you all that gives life any meaning or death any hope.'

At this moment a morning caller was announced and Fred took his departure. But her last words followed him. All that day

and for many a day they echoed through his brain. Watching Lois closely, he acknowledged to himself that she had gained something that filled life for her with a sweet and noble meaning; and standing, a few months after, at the open grave of an earnest Christian, a young man, whose instantaneous death had shocked the whole community, he realized that the religion of Jesus Christ was indeed 'all that gives death any hope.'

To-day he can say sincerely and joyfully,

My life I give to Thee
I would not be my own:
O Saviour, let me be
Thine ever, Thine alone:
My heart, my life, my all I bring
To Thee, my Saviour and my King.

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President Teddy Roosevelt—From 'Books of To-day.'
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